

---

---

# Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

---

---

Volume 30 Issue 12

December 2020

---

---

BIRDWOOD GULLY & MAGDALA TRACK

TOPIC

## OUR NOVEMBER WALK

MADOLINE GLEN,  
BIRDWOOD GULLY and the  
MAGDALA TRACK at  
SPRINGWOOD

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020

For many many years I had seen the small almost insignificant sign on the highway at Springwood pointing to Birdwood Gully; I had promised myself I must investigate this track but never got around to it until relatively recently. I had always thought the name to be most evocative, a wooded gully rich with bird life and song; indeed that proved to be the case, an enchanting area. But to think that was the rationale for the naming of the gully was of course too simple an assumption by far; as we have seen, the reasons for the naming of features in these mountains are usually more complex than that.

Major General Baron William Riddell Birdwood, then Lieutenant-General, was given the command of the Australian and New Zealand forces raised in 1915 for service in Europe. He became very popular from the start as he spent much time among the troops; though one detractor claimed “he bored the men and they bored him”. He commanded the troops who made that historic landing on the 25<sup>th</sup> April at the place he named Anzac. During the seven months the garrison was



Summer in the Bush

besieged, Birdwood was seen daily sharing the risks in the front trenches and chatting with his men; his concern for his men became an important factor in Anzac morale. Birdwood toured Australia and New Zealand in 1920 and was very favourably received. So this little gully in Springwood carries the name of the Englishman, born in Kirkee India, who assigned the title ‘Anzac’ to that wartime landing place so important to the Australian psyche.

Nine walkers gathered in Perry Avenue under a clear blue sky; the air was perfectly still and already the temperature was rising, a portent of conditions later in the day. We made our way up Bednal Road to Lucinda Avenue and the start of the Madoline Glen Track.

Madoline (Madeline or Madaline) Glen is named after Madeline Boland who was born in the Bathurst district in 1840 to Thomas and Mary Boland. She was christened Johanna but was known as Madeline. Her father operated The Weatherboard Inn at what is now Wentworth Falls in the 1840s and the Royal Hotel at Springwood in the 1880s. Madeline purchased the land which is now Madoline Glen in 1875, along with a second portion. Madeline never married and supported herself by building cottages and renting them out; she also built a store. She died in 1909 at which time she owned three houses.

The track initially led us down through clear grassland then into open woodland, we were serenaded by the pulsating song of the multitude of cicadas in the trees; a typically Australian summer scenario.

As we moved deeper into the gully the denser tree canopy shaded us and the track now wound through large banks of fern, possibly the Common Ground Fern or Rainbow Fern (*Calochlaena dubia*). On the edge of the track were a couple of Purple Fan-flowers (*Scaevola ramosissima*) their distinctive one-sided five-petalled flowers hanging on their wiry stems.

The track skirted past a majestic Turpentine (*Syncarpia glomulifera*) displaying its fibrous striated bark and scattered on the ground were many of its “flying saucer” shaped seed capsules. Nearby was a magnificent Smooth-barked Apple or Sydney Red Gum (*Angophora costata*) its huge lower trunk carrying many knobbly protrusions, presenting a grotesque beauty; it is impossible to pass one of these trees without touching its smooth bark.

Soon the track took us through a deep overhang cave where the walls and roof were quite moist; it is said that glow-worms can be seen here and in other nearby caves. Presently we were beside Shelleys Creek, a small tributary of Springwood Creek. Here there were large moss-shrouded boulders and the cacophony of the cicadas was now reduced, replaced by the tinkling of running water and by birdsong.

We crossed the creek at a point where it disappears below a rock shelf and re-emerges as a small waterfall part way down a rock face. We cross back on circular “stepping stones” near the junction of Shelleys and Springwood Creeks and soon encounter a second huge Angophora, no less knobbly nor grotesquely beautiful than the previous example.

The track then took us beside Springwood Creek as we climbed up out of the gully. We crossed a bridge and climbed away from the creek and arrived at an amazing feature of Birdwood Gully. There is a huge wind-eroded,

arched stone wall decorated with thin protruding wafers of sandstone. At one end of this wall there is a slim column rising at an angle from the base of the wall to a point about half way up the face, appearing as a flying buttress on a majestic cathedral. Near to this fine feature is an arched tunnel running along the face of the wall. A fascinating example of Mother Nature’s sculptural abilities. Ray Nesci pointed out a large Staghorn Fern (*Platynerium superbum*) thriving high up in a nearby tree; an extra touch to the magnificence of this area; we paused here for morning tea.

Following morning tea we continued on and were soon at the Bednal Road end of the track. We searched in vain for the Aboriginal carving of a lizard or gecko beside the track in this area, then made our way up the road to return to the cars. So ended walk number one for today.

Now for walk number two. We made our way across to Picnic Point Reserve on the south side of Springwood. (Springwood, by the way, takes its name from Governor Macquarie’s journey to Bathurst on the newly opened road built by William Cox. On 26<sup>th</sup> April 1815 the Governor’s party stopped at a pretty wooded area where there was a spring; he named it Spring-Wood. That spring was in the much more enigmatically named Birdwood Gully.)

From Picnic Point we were to walk some of the Magdella Creek Track; again a feature whose name is rather obscure.

Magdala Creek is named after the Parish of Magdala in which it lies. The Parish however is named after the Battle of Magdala in far away Ethiopia.

In 1868 the Emperor of Ethiopia, Tewodros, was holding about forty British officials as prisoners; an affront to Great Britain’s honour which could not be allowed to continue.

The solution to solving this ‘Abyssinian difficulty’ was to assemble a force of 62,000 men, 36,000 animals including 40 elephants and launch an expedition from India. Lieutenant General Robert Napier,

commander-in-chief of the Bombay army was given the task of organising the transportation of this assembled force across the ocean to the Red Sea coast and over about four hundred miles of very difficult terrain to reach the Magdala fortress where the prisoners were held. As the forces advanced the Emperor saw the hopelessness of the situation; shortly before they reached the fortress he released the prisoners and committed suicide. And so, the Magdala Campaign, which cost £8 million, is remembered, for reasons that elude me, in the name of a small creek, a waterfall and a Parish at Springwood.

Eight walkers, Simon having decided one very special walk per day was sufficient, set off down the steps which led to the bridge across Magdala Creek. We crossed the bridge and followed the line of the creek. Here the high pitched chorus of the multitude of cicadas was accompanied by the mellifluous tones of a profusion of frogs settled along the pools of the creek; a very pleasant symphonic combination.

As the track mainly clings to the creekline we were afforded protection from the heat of the day. We passed a few examples of the Nodding Blue Lily (*Stypandra glauca*) their yellow filaments accentuating the blue petals of the flowers. In areas where there were banks of ground ferns lining the track there were elegantly curved croziers or fiddle heads of young unfurling fern fronds; a delight to the eye.

The creek consisted of still, sandy-bottomed pools lined with mossy boulders, connected by shallow runnels which rippled, purred and plashed across pebble beds. We crossed and re-crossed the stream several times on stepping stones, strategically placed branches and on rock platforms where the water divided and ran in shallow sluices.

At one such crossing my better half Helen decided she had had enough and decided to await our return.

We passed four groups of school students, heading in the opposite direction to us, who were in the final stage of a Duke of Edinburgh

award outing, they were all very courteous in making room for us.

Along more open areas the track was illuminated by the bright pink flower heads of the Grass-leaf Trigger Plant (*Stylidium graminifolium*), their columns cocked and ready. Visiting insects trigger the reflexed column which swings over and hits the insect on the top of its body or head to transfer pollen. Such an intriguing mechanism hidden in flowers of such beauty; isn't Mother Nature amazing.

A little further along the track we came across three Flannel Flowers (*Actinotus helianthi*). The velvety green-tipped bracts surrounding the central flower head are indeed things of beauty, both visually and to the touch.

After about an hour and a half of walking the heat of the day was beginning to tell, so we paused for lunch and then began our return journey.

We met up with Helen who had been paddling in the cool waters accompanied by a pair of pure white domestic ducks; we got a glimpse of them further upstream.

Soon we were back at Picnic Point and rested awhile in the shelter shed before heading for home after another day exploring the wonders on offer in these mountains.

John Cardy

Footnote: Along with other sources, some of the history and derivation of place names in this and other issues of the newsletter are gleaned from Brian Fox's wonderful publication *Blue Mountains Geographical Dictionary* and Keith Painter's informative *Pocket Pal* series of bushwalking booklets.

## **OUR DECEMBER WALK**

**FRIDAY 4<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2020**

**NB NB NB: FIRST FRIDAY, NOT THE USUAL THIRD. ONLY TWO WEEKS AFTER OUR NOVEMBER WALK.**

**Open Forest and Heathland, Views across the Wollemi Wilderness and Wollangambe River, Fascinating Rock Platforms****The Tessellated Pavements at Mt Irvine**

This was the venue for the first walk by this group on 17<sup>th</sup> May 1990, a little over 30 years ago. We had planned to revisit on 15<sup>th</sup> May this year and follow with a celebratory luncheon, but Covid-19 put paid to that; this, our 379<sup>th</sup> walk, will be a combined Christmas and 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary affair. This is a relatively easy walk of about 6 kilometres return; it follows the ridge, which runs north, between the Wollangambe River and Bowens Creek; there are vantage points from which great views are to be had over and beyond both these wild streams.

**Meet at the Mount Wilson Village Hall (opposite the Fire Station) at 8.30am for a 9.00am departure. A vehicle rationalisation will be carried out here for the 15 km drive to Mt Irvine. (Parking is restricted at the walk start point especially if there has been wet weather, so the fewer cars the better.) Please ring in as early as possible to aid in the organisation of vehicles.**

Bring morning tea, perhaps a few snacks and **plenty of water** only on the walk, we will return to the Mt Wilson Village Hall for lunch; see details below.

**For this walk and/or the luncheon contact Helen & John Cardy on 9871 3661 or mobile 0400 444 966. TO ASSIST WITH VEHICLE AND LUNCHEON ARRANGEMENTS PLEASE BOOK IN BY SUNDAY 29<sup>th</sup> November, NO LATER PLEASE.**

**CHRISTMAS and ANNIVERSARY LUNCHEON**

Thirty years ago Libby Raines and Mary Reynolds led the very first walk of the Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group to the Tessellated Pavements; this will be our 2020 Christmas walk returning to the Village Hall at about 2.00 pm for an early Christmas get together and a late 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration. Social distancing will be practiced

so attendance within the hall will be limited to 34.

Please bring your own sandwich or whatever for lunch; homemade sausage rolls and spinach ricotta puffs will be served. Then our traditional strawberries and blueberries, very generously supplied each year by Ray Nesci, will be served with delicious homemade Pavlova. Tea and coffee will be supplied but bring your own water and other drinks.

**Meet for lunch at about 2.00pm.**

**Should you need to leave a message after the evening of Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December do so on Helen's mobile only (0400 444 966), BUT PLEASE BOOK EARLY.**

---

**FUTURE WALKS (Tentative Schedule)**

**Friday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – No walk in the height of summer**

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021 – To be advised**

---

**BUSH CARE**

**Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated.**

**Friday 11<sup>th</sup> December – Queens Avenue, opposite Windy Ridge**

**Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110**

**Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141**